DOCUMENTS

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RUSSIAN ÉMIGRÉ FUNDS IN SWITZERLAND, 1916: AN OKHRANA REPORT

When war came to Europe in August 1914, several thousand Russians were caught by surprise in Switzerland,[1] and their number increased with the influx of refugees from Austria and Germany. Cut off from their homeland and temporarily unable to exchange their money, they faced great hardship. Self-help societies sprang up everywhere; some groups experimented with organizing cheap or free kitchens.[2] Swiss newspapers continually carried notices of benefit concerts or literary evenings. The Russian mission in Bern offered assistance, and the degree of cooperation which briefly sprang up between Russian émigré organizations and the Russian legation was subsequently to prove an embarrassment for both sides.[3]

Among the more lasting self-help institutions were the funds, or treasuries (*kassy*), established by various émigré groups, such as students or members of particular political parties. Fund members who had jobs contributed money to the funds, and in turn less fortunate members could receive aid. (Among the best known of the beneficiaries of such groups was Karl Radek.[4]) In some cantons, the funds even had official status as the guarantors of their members' behavior.

The following document, taken from the archives of the Paris branch of the *Okhrana*, recounts a meeting of representatives of Socialist funds, held in the fall of 1916.[5] From it, one can draw a

[1] According to the Swiss census of 1910, there were 4607 residents of Switzerland whose native language was Russian, and another 2047 listed Polish as their native tongue. In all, 8458 persons were listed as coming from European Russia, of whom 3933 were men and 4525 women. See Die Ergebnisse der eidgenossischen Volkszählung vom 1. Dezember 1910 (Schweizerische Statistik, 195. Lieferung), I (Bern, 1915), pp. 65, 74.

[2] Cf. L. Trotskii, Voina i revoliutsiia (Moscow, 1923), I, p. 60.

[3] Cf. the archives of the Liga schweizerischer Hilfsvereine für russische Gefangene und Verbannte, IISG, Amsterdam.

[4] Emil Szittya, Das Kuriositäten-Kabinett (Konstanz, 1923), p. 200.

[5] Okhrana Archives, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California, XVIIa, f. 5. The original is in Russian. The Okhrana Archives, obtained by the Hoover Institution in 1927, were opened to the public in 1964.

unique picture of the personal tribulations, as opposed to the political activities, of these émigrés.

We have abundant testimony, on the one hand, of the existence of the émigré funds, but we know little about their activities. A recent biography of Krupskaia, for example, mentions only briefly the founding of the Central Secretariat of the émigré funds.[1] This Okhrana report sheds more light on this organization.

The agents who provided the raw material for the report were themselves members of the Russian colony in Switzerland. "Paul" was in reality Janus Erdmanov Shuster, a resident of Zürich, whose regular task was to report on the activities of Latvians and Bolsheviks in Zürich. His superiors had once commended him for his "ardour and zealous work". "Charpentier" was Isaak Leontevich Abramov, a long time Okhrana agent who at the beginning of the war had been interned in Austria but had been allowed to enter Switzerland in May 1915. In 1916 he was secretary of the Geneva "Prizyv" group, a defensist organization, and his specialty for the Okhrana was reporting on the Social Revolutionaries.[2]

The term "political émigré", as used in this document, may be somewhat confusing, since it is used in a more restrictive sense than usual in historical writing. Here it means not just anyone who has left Russia for political reasons; it refers to the much smaller group of émigrés who had entered Switzerland without valid identification papers.

Foreigners arriving in Switzerland usually received one of three types of residence permits. Those with proper papers obtained either an *Aufenthaltsbewilligung* or a *Niederlassungsbewilligung*. The former stipulated that the permission was granted only for a definite period of time, while the latter had an indefinite validity. Persons without papers could obtain a *Toleranz*, valid for a specific period of time, although it could be renewed. In order to obtain the *Toleranz*, however, the applicant had to post a bond. In Zürich, for example, this bond was set at 1500 Francs for a single person or 3000 Fr. for a family.[3] Local authorities, moreover, were not permitted to waive this condition, and the émigrés found, as Krupskaia later complained, that the bond was not automatically valid in other cantons.

[1] S. M. Lebidova and S. A. Pavlotskaia, Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaia (Leningrad, 1962), pp. 114-16. See also N. K. Krupskaya, Reminiscences of Lenin (Moscow, 1959), pp. 333-34.

[2] See Valerian Konstantinovich Agafonov, Zagranichnaia okhranka (Petrograd, 1918), pp. 309, 381.

[3] Gemeindegesetz (Kanton Zürich) betreffend das Gemeindewesen vom 27. Juni 1875, Zürich, Staatsarchiv, III Pa 222.

During the war, another category of foreigners gained significance, the *Refraktäre*, persons who for one reason or another refused to answer the call to military service in their own countries. Willi Münzenberg, the German youth leader, had received *Refraktär* status in Zürich even before the war. When Lenin settled in Zürich in 1916, he was also called a *Refraktär;* in addition to the usual bond, he had to post another 100 Fr.[1] (In the fall of 1916, the bond for *Refraktäre* was officially set at 1500 Fr.)

It should be noted at the same time, however, that a particular individual's status could change over a period of time. Paul Axelrod, for example, had first been granted a *Toleranz* by Zürich authorities, but in 1891 he produced a passport issued by the French Consul General in Geneva. Eventually he became a citizen of Zürich. On the other hand, Lenin first came to Geneva in 1900 with a valid passport, but in 1914, upon his arrival in Bern from Austria, he had to apply for a *Toleranz*.[2]

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Top Secret

To His Excellency,
The Director of the Police Department.[3]

I have the honor to report to your Excellency that according to information received from the collaborators *Paul* and *Charpentier* a conference of émigré funds of Switzerland took place in Geneva on October 28 and 29 of this year (Report No 503, May 16/29, 1916).[4]

At this conference the following émigré funds were represented:

1. The Zürich fund – Hans (Ivan) Fedor *Bergman*, Latvian, peasant from the volost Goldingen, guberniia Kurland, born in 1886 or 1888, engineer by profession (Report No 852, August 25/September 7, 1916).

[1] See the record of Lenin's Toleranz in Zürich, No 2242, granted on May 22, 1916, in Zürich, Stadtarchiv, Abt. V, E[b] No 439 (Toleranz). Lenin's bond was posted by Stadtrat O. Lang and Fritz Platten.

[2] See the dossiers on Axelrod and Lenin in Bern, Bundesarchiv, E 4320, Polizeidienst (1889-1920), Bände 241, 267. These files, it should be noted, are remarkably brief, testifying to the limited activity of the Swiss Federal Fremdenpolizei.

[3] The translation of the document intends to reproduce as carefully as possible the style – sometimes unpolished, sometimes chancellary-like – of the original, which accounts for any awkwardness in the English text.

[4] Most of the reports mentioned can be found in the Okhrana Archive, XIIIb (1).

2. The Bern fund – Isaak *Kornblum*, political émigré, was exiled, Social-Democrat-Bolshevik; student at the University of Bern, born in April 1880 in Odessa (Report No 1138, November 11/24, 1916).[1]

3. The Lausanne fund – *Mogilevskii*, party name: "Vladimirov", Jew (presumably Vulf Iankelev Mogilevskii who lived in Berlin, in 1910 and was mentioned in Departmental Instruction No 115021, September 3, 1910), from Simferopol, gives private lessons; 36 years old, Social-Democrat-Menshevik; and Alexander Alexandrov *Rozenberg*, pseudonym "Gorskii", mentioned in Departmental Instruction No 115021, September 3, 1910, baptized Jew from Smolensk, born January 24, 1885, has no definite occupation, Socialist-Revolutionary Internationalist. Lives in Lausanne at avenue Dapples, 27.

4. The Clarens fund – Mikhail Petrov *Kristi*, mentioned in Report No 1043, October 15/28, 1916, lives near Vevey, and Vilgelm Adolfovich *Bukhgolts*, party name "Bukov", Social Democrat, lived in Berlin before the war, presently lives in Lausanne, German subject, received his education in Russia, 45 years old.[2]

5. The La Chaux de Fonds fund – *Abramovich*, Jew from Tiflis, political émigré, Social-Democrat-Bolshevik, party name "Rakov", works in a watch factory, 25 years old.[3]

6. The Geneva fund – Petr Lazarev *Voikov* (Departmental Instruction No 134154, June 2, 1908 and Report No 53, January 18/31, 1916), Social-Democrat-Menshevik, native of Petrograd, 35 years old, gives private lessons, lives in Geneva at rue de la Servatte, 34; and Sarra Leibova *Ravich* (the same as Olga *Karpinskaia*) Social-Democrat-Bolshevik (Report No 942, September 22/October 5, 1916).[4]

The Geneva party organizations were represented at the conference, but not officially, i.e., without the right to vote, as follows: Bund – Revekka *Plastinina* (Report No 827, August 20/September 2, 1916); Mensheviks – Anatolii *Divilkovskii*, pseudonym: Avdeev (Report No 610, November 1/14, 1916); Vperedists – *Lebedev*, party name "Valerian".[5]

[1] On Kornblum, cf. Istoricheskii Arkhiv, 1959, No 3, p. 42.

[2] On Kristi, cf. Pis'ma P. B. Aksel'roda i Yu. O. Martova (Berlin, 1924), p. 124. On Bukhgolts, or Wilhelm Buchholz, cf. Botho Brachmann, Russische Sozialdemokraten in Berlin 1895-1914 (Berlin, 1962).

[3] On Abramovich, cf. Lenin, Poln. Sobr. Soch., izd. 5-oe, Vol. 49 (Moscow, 1964), p. 613.

[4] On Olga Ravich, who was the wife of V. A. Karpinsky, the librarian of the Geneva Bolshevik group, see ibid., p. 659.

[5] Vperëd was a journal published in Geneva during the war by A. V. Lunacharskii. See K. Ostroukhova, "Gruppa 'Vperëd' (1909-1917)", in: Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, 1925, No 1 (36), 217. On Divilkovskii, cf. S. V. Tiutiukin, "Leninskie referaty o voine (osen' 1914)", in: Istoriia SSSR, 1967, No 2, p. 37.

The social patriotic groups were not informed of the conference.[1]

Also present were the following persons from the Central Secretariat of Emigré Funds:

1. Nadezhda Konstantinva *Ulianova* (the wife of "Lenin"), née Krupskaia.
2. Feliks Iakovlev *Kon.*[2]
3. David *Ioffe,* from Riga, born in 1889 (Report No 803, August 15/28, 1916).

The Presidium consisted of the following persons, *Kornblum* chairman, *Kon* and *Bukhgolts* members.

At the opening of the conference, the chairman declared that the Presidium would only permit members of party groups to be present at the conference. As a result, a large part of the assembly had to leave the meeting. This measure, in the chairman's words, could be explained by the fact that there are untrustworthy persons in the Russian colonies in Switzerland, as is shown by reports in the Russian press about party life in Switzerland, which give the real names of some party activists as well.

The agenda of the conference was as follows:

1. Minutes of the preceding conference.
2. Reports of the local organizations.
3. Reports of the Central Secretariat.
4. Report of the tuberculosis commission.
5. Labor Bureau.
6. Arrangement of guaranties for the right of residence in Switzerland.
7. Election of the Secretariat and the Reviewing Commission.
8. Miscellaneous.

The minutes of the preceding conference were not read. Kon only gave a résumé and pointed out the decisions taken at that conference of which the most important is the creation of a Central Secretariat of émigré funds in Switzerland. The purpose of the Secretariat is to co-ordinate the activities of the different funds, to maintain permanent contacts between them, to regulate material aid to people suffering from tuberculosis; and to find work for the needy. Having heard Kon's résumé, the conference considered the next item of the agenda.

From the reports of the local organizations, it is clear that the Zürich émigré fund is the largest and the best organized. It numbers some 160 members regularly paying their membership fees. Its annual turnover is 5000 Fr. The Zürich's fund main task at present is the

[1] "Social patriots" were organized at this time around the newspaper Prizyv, published in Paris.

[2] On Kon, see Olga Hess Gankin and H. H. Fisher, The Bolsheviks and the World War (Stanford, 1960), p. 789.

arrangement of guaranties for the right of residence for political émigrés in Switzerland, and thanks to its close ties with representatives of Swiss Social Democracy, this job is done better in Zürich than elsewhere.[1] In Zürich seventy-five political émigrés are living on guaranty.

The Bern émigré fund was strictly a Social Democratic fund until the middle of this year and members of other parties did not belong to it. Only in May of this year it was organized on a broader basis, and then members of other groups joined. There are seven political émigrés in Bern; all have earnings, therefore all the means of the Bern fund are turned over to the Central Secretariat for the tuberculosis fund. Thirty-five members belong to the fund; in the last half year its income amounted to 250 Fr. The Bern fund has no ties with Swiss Social Democracy, therefore it cannot arrange guaranties, and in these questions it cooperates with the Zürich fund.

The Basel fund sent no representative. It reported that there are few political émigrés there; the work of the fund is limited for lack of resources. Guaranties can be arranged only with difficulties and cost. The fund asks the conference to organize the matter of the guaranties.

The La Chaux de Fonds fund was only recently organized. It has 15 members, all political émigrés. Guaranties are arranged by a monthly payment of 25 Fr. for each émigré (up to 600 Fr.), but since all have earnings, the matter of the guaranties presents no difficulties, although the fund expresses the wish that the guaranties be personal.

There are two émigré funds in Lausanne. The first is the old, general fund, to which belong Social-Democrats-Mensheviks, Partiitsy,[2] one Bolshevik, and Social Revolutionaries. This fund has twenty-eight members. The second fund, the Social-Democrat-Bolshevik fund, was formed in the middle of this year. The second fund has seven members, but it is developing an intense activity. In the last three months it has collected about 200 Fr.

It is clear from the reports of the representatives of both Lausanne funds, that the existence there of two funds is abnormal and harmful to the general effort. There were prolonged debates about this question, the conference demanded the union of the two funds, both sides expressed agreement, but on the condition that the old conflict be resolved, which had caused the separation of the activities. (The conflict arose from a personal clash between some members of the Social Democratic group in Lausanne). The conference attempted to

[1] Foreign Socialists in Zürich could belong to the Swiss Social Democratic Party through membership in such organizations as the Eintracht Society.

[2] Mensheviks formerly gathered around Plekhanov. The Partiitsy split on the war issue in defensists and internationalists.

reconcile the two sides, but the delegates declared that they lacked full power from their groups as to this question. The conference then chose a commission to settle this conflict; its members being: *Kon*, *Bukhgolts* and Dmitrii Zakharov *Manuilskii* ("Bezrabotnyi").

As is evident from the delegates' reports, the matter of guaranties in Lausanne is bad. Despite émigré payments amounting to 1000-1500 Fr., the permission to reside is granted for six months only and, at that the police summon them constantly, submitting them to various interrogations, ascertaining their reasons for leaving Russia, their police records, and their military obligations.

The Clarens fund was formed recently at the initiative of the Central Secretariat. It has fifteen members; its activity is just beginning to show.

The Geneva fund has broken up. It was made up from various elements, and party differences brought about its collapse. It will be reorganized, and only members of political groups will be allowed to join.

Voikov, the representative of the defunct Geneva fund, proposed that the fund should not admit Anarchist-Communists, who by their behaviour often undermine the authority of the fund. It was suggested to him that admitting the anarchists to the fund could have a good influence on them, as was the case in Zürich. There they have their own representative in the fund; they are interested in its existence, which permits them to reside in Switzerland. After discussion of this question, it was decided to admit also the Anarchist-Communists to the Geneva fund.

Ulianova then presented a report on the activity of the Central Secretariat of the émigré funds of Switzerland.

The tasks of the Secretariat, in the words of the speaker, consisted in maintaining relations between the various funds, in resolving problems, and in coordinating their activities. The Secretariat seeks, by all possible means, by public and private contacts, to locate Russian political émigrés and to found funds among them. It had set up an inquiry about the establishment of a tuberculosis fund, which in turn led to the necessity of founding a special commission, which is already working. A second inquiry about [political] émigrés in Switzerland was generally unsuccessful. In all seventy-three persons responded, although more than 300 [political] émigrés live in Switzerland. Still, the results of this inquiry showed that more than twenty percent of the [political] émigrés have been living in Switzerland for more than five years; most of them are twenty-five to thirty-five years old; sixty-four belong to party groups, with Social Democrats (Bolsheviks) predominating. Working conditions are normal; there are virtually no

unemployed among those able to work, chiefly émigrés of the intellectual professions are hard up, and if one could organize a Labor Bureau for them, then they would be delivered from many privations. This is particularly important because of the possibility, after the end of the war, of a new, reinforced emigration.

The Central Secretariat's financial report is added to this report.[1]

Kon spoke for the tuberculosis commission, reporting that for the most part the émigrés live in unhealthy circumstances, as a result of which a large percentage of them suffer from tuberculosis, and so die the best revolutionary forces. This is a great loss to the future revolutionary forces. This is a great loss to the future revolutionary struggle, they must be saved. In order to find ways and means to fight tuberculosis among the émigrés, there was organized, at the beginning of this year, a special tuberculosis commission attached to the Zürich fund to consider means of combating this disease. A special tuberculosis fund was established by the commission for the opening of a workers' home for the sick (a sanatorium). The opening of such a sanatorium and the guarantee of its existence for one year require an expenditure of 12000 Fr. The fund intended for this purpose, has received a relatively small amount, but wealthy persons sympathizing with the cause have promised to contribute what is still needed. The task of the conference is only to express its opinion on the question of the desirability of opening a sanatorium.

The majority stated as their opinion that for the designated sum of money, the sick émigrés could be placed successfully in Swiss sanatoria, but after Kon had declared that the wealthy contributors had stipulated that their contribution be specifically used to establish a Russian sanatorium, the conference decided to accept the proposal of the tuberculosis commission and to promote the collection of money for the tuberculosis fund.

Persons promising large contributions for the establishment of sanatoria for tubercular émigrés, as is clear from Agency reports, are: *Brodskaia*, a millionaire living in Basel, and a certain *Bespalova* in Zürich from Kursk or Kharkov. It proved impossible to get more detailed information about these persons.

Further was considered the question of the organization of a Labor Bureau.

Because of the extremely difficult material position of intellectuals and unskilled workers who have no trade experience, the conference decided to take measures to teach such persons a trade. The Central

[1] This report was not found in the Okhrana archive.

Secretariat is charged to handle this. The La Chaux de Fonds fund offered to instruct some persons in the watch trade.

The conference thanked then the Central Secretariat for its work and especially its secretary Ulianova.

On the question of the arrangement of guaranties for Russian [political] émigrés in Switzerland, [two] Swiss representatives attending to the conference spoke: a member of the Central Administration of the Swiss Social Democratic Party, Vogel, and a representative of Swiss Social Democratic organizations in the French speaking part of Switzerland, Karlen.

They promised all possible cooperation in this respect to Russian [political] émigrés and they are ready to take the appropriate steps in this direction with the Swiss government in order to get permissions for personal guaranties for the whole of Switzerland. But Russian émigrés living in Switzerland must themselves expand the activity of the émigré funds in order to be able to answer for the [political] émigrés to the Swiss Social Democratic Party and to control their activities. Furthermore, they advised the émigrés not to take recourse to the fabrication of false passports, as had happened in Geneva and La Chaux de Fonds, since this compromises the émigrés in the eyes of the Swiss government. The Swiss Social Democratic Party can do nothing against the interrogations of political émigrés by the Swiss police, since this depends on the police organs of the separate cantons. These interrogations should not be dangerous for the émigrés, if, naturally, the information is not passed on to agents of the Russian Government.

After this the conference discussed the question of the choice of a location for the Central Secretariat. It was decided to leave it in Zürich.

As to the question of electing members of the Central Secretariat, the conference chooses, according to the constitution of the émigré funds, only the secretary; the two members are chosen by the émigré fund where the Secretariat is situated. Ulianova was again elected secretary. A reviewing commission was not appointed; the conference assigned the task of reviewing the work of the Central Secretariat to the reviewing commission of the Zürich émigré fund.

With this the conference was ended.

For the Director of the Foreign Agency

No 1288
Paris

24 December 1916/
6 January 1917